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ABSTRACT

This report provides an overview of primary education in Austria. Section 1 describes: (1) the structure of the school system; (2) school organization; (3) admission to primary school; (4) premature admission to primary school; (5) deferral from school attendance; (6) official aims of primary education; (7) responsibility for the organization of primary education; (8) links between preschool and primary education and between primary and lower secondary education; (9) transfer to schools leading to higher forms of education; (10) admission testing; (11) number of schools, pupils, and teachers; (12) arrangements for grouping pupils and official class sizes; (13) length of school day, week, and year; (14) major areas of the primary school curriculum; (15) main methods of pupil assessment; (16) arrangements for pre-service and in-service teacher training; (17) support services available to primary schools; and (18) institutional links between primary school, parents, and the community. Section 2 describes problems and trends in primary education, including school entrance, pilot projects to change pupil assessment practices, integration of children with special needs, implementation of teaching methods appropriate to the new primary curriculum, morning school versus day school, pilot project on handwriting, and the situation in regard to migrant workers. Section 3 cites several studies on Austrian primary education. (RH)

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"Innovation in primary education"

Primary education in Austria

PS 017405

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COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION

Project No. 8 - Innovation in Primary Education

PRIMARY EDUCATION IN AUSTRIA

Report submitted by
the Austrian authorities

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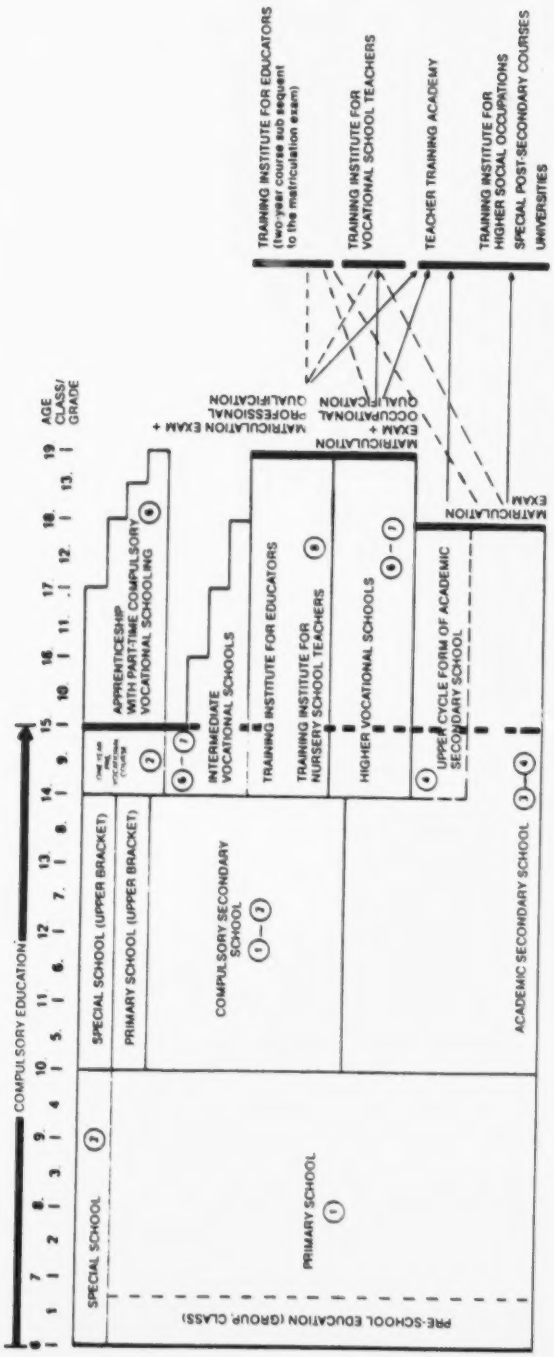
1. Basic information

1.1 The school system in Austria



1.2 School organization

In the School Periods Act it is stipulated that all children having their permanent residence in Austria come under compulsory schooling. It starts with the first of September following upon the date when the child has completed his or her sixth year of age, and lasts nine school years.
Basic schooling comprises, in addition to the pre-school stage (pre-school group, pre-school class), the first four grades of primary school. In addition there are special schools for mentally or physically handicapped children which purposefully take account of the various handicaps of children.

1.2.1 Admission to primary school at the beginning of compulsory school attendance

The admission to primary school of children compelled to attend school (i.e. those children who have completed their 6th year of life by August 31st of the following school year) is effected upon registration of the pupil. The deadlines for such registration shall be fixed by the responsible provincial school boards on the basis of local requirements; however, the period allowed for such registration shall end, at the latest, one month before the beginning of the principal holidays. Parents or guardians have the duty of registering in due time their children compelled to attend school; if possible, they have to present them personally.

1.2.2 Premature admission to primary school:

Children mature for school and born between September 1st and December 31st of the current calendar year may be prematurely admitted to primary school, in so far as parents submit a written application to this effect to the head of the primary school concerned within the period allowed for registration. A child will

be considered mature for school if it may be justifiably assumed that the child will be able to follow instruction in the first grade without being subjected to undue physical or mental stress. Such premature admission of children who have not yet come under compulsory schooling may be renounced until the end of the current calendar year, if, after the admission of the child to the first grade, it becomes apparent that he or she is not mature for school after all. These children may afterwards be registered by their parents for attendance at an educational institution of the pre-school stage.

1.2.3 Deferral from school attendance of children coming under compulsory schooling:

Children coming under compulsory schooling are to be deferred from attendance of the first grade of primary school if they do not show the necessary maturity for school. Such deferral may be pronounced ex officio or upon application of the children's parents. Children thus deferred from school attendance must or may (depending on how far away they live from the nearest pre-school institution) fulfil their first year of compulsory schooling in the pre-school stage (pre-school group or pre-school class.)
In the case of children coming under compulsory schooling but not yet mature for school, both the time in which the child attended the pre-school stage and the time in which the child was deferred from school attendance will be included in the length of compulsory school attendance. In the case of prematurely admitted children whose admission is renounced later on, this time is not included in the length of compulsory school attendance.

1.3 The official aims of primary education

The official aims of Austrian schools are stipulated in the School Organization Act of 1962:
According to the School Organization Act of July 25th, 1962, "it shall be the task of the Austrian school to foster the development of the talents and potential abilities of young persons

in accordance with ethical, religious and social values and the appreciation of that which is true, good, and beautiful, by giving them an education corresponding to their respective stages of development and to their respective courses of study. It shall give young people the knowledge and skills required for their future lives and occupations and train them to acquire knowledge on their own initiative.

Young people shall be trained to become healthy, capable, conscientious and responsible members of society and citizens of the democratic and federal Republic of Austria. They shall be encouraged to develop an independent judgement and social understandig, to be open-minded to the philosophy and political thinking of others, they shall be enabled to participate in the economic and cultural life of Austria, of Europe and of the world and to make their contribution, in love of freedom and peace, to the common taskes of mankind." (Section 2)

Beyond this the aim of the elemtary school with its 4 grades is to give all pupils a basic general education (cf. The major areas of primary school curriculum). Within the lower secondary cycle, the upper elementary school aims to build up on the common elementary education for all pupils offered by the elementary school and to give pupils an extended education, possibly also a complementary education. Thus the pupils are to be prepared for practical life as well as for continuing their educational careers.

1.4 The responsibility for the organization of primary education

Legal authorities for school inspection are in most cases the district school boards, the provincial school boards, and - as the supreme authority - the Federal Ministry od Education, Arts and Sports.
Compulsory general schools are supervised by the district school boards, which are under the authority of the provincial boards. These are responsible to the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Sports.

The compulsory general schools are maintained by the communities, that means that the communities have to pay for the school-buildings and their maintenance. The salary of the teachers however, is paid by the state.

1.5 The links between pre-school and primary education and between primary and lower secondary education

Pre-school clases serve for promoting the attainment of school maturity by children who, though being compelled to attend school on the basis of their age, are deferred from school attendance for one year.
Pre-school classes were pilot projects, but with the 7th Amendment of the School Organization Act they became compulsory in 1983.
After the 4th grade of elementary school pupils have to go either to the compulsory secondary general school or the top-level secondary general school.

1.5.1 Transfer to schools leading to higher forms of education

In the course of the fourth grade, either towards the end of the first semester or at the beginning of the second semester of the instruction year, parents or guardians are informed about the further educational career recommendable for the respective child on the basis of his or her interests and past achievements.
The prerequisite for admission to Hauptschule (compulsory secondary school) is the successful completion of grade four of primary school. There are no further admission requirements, since the allotment to achievement groups is effected in Hauptschule itself after an observation period of eight to twelve weeks.

The prerequisite for admission to allgemeinbildende höhere Schule (academic secondary school) is the successful completion of grade four of primary school, an additional condition being that the child must have received the grade of 'very good' (1) or 'good' (2) in the subjects German, reading and mathematics. However,

this is not necessary if the school conference states that, in spite of a grade of 'satisfactory' (3) in these compulsory subjects, the child will be able, judging from his other achievements, to meet the requirements of allgemeinbildende höhere Schule (AHS). Children failing to meet these requirements may be registered by their parents or guardian within a period of two weeks with the school head of an allgemeinbildende höhere Schule for an admission test. The aptitude requirements will be waived if the admission test is successfully completed.

1.5.1.1 Admission test:

This admission test covers the subject matter discussed in the fourth grade of primary school on a slightly more difficult level. It comprises both a written and an oral test. This admission test may not be repeated.

1.6 The number of schools, pupils and teachers

Primary schools [1]) in 1986/87

	Schools	Classes	Pupils	Teachers
Burgenland	211	735	m 6.292 f 6.104 tog.12.396	m 349 f 746 tog.1.105
Carinthia	339	1.429	m 14.258 f 13.429 tog.27.687	m 525 f 1.709 tog.2.234
Lower Austria	653	3237	m 31.995 f 30.198 tog.62.193	m 1.030 f 3.981 tog.5.011
Upper Austria	597	3226	m 33.299 f 31.300 tog.64.599	m 1.106 f 4.522 tog.5.628
Salzburg	184	1124	m 12.056 f 11.016 tog.23.072	m 327 f 1.440 tog.1.767
Styria	590	3055	m 28.840 f 27.306 tog.56.146	m 808 f 3.856 tog.4.664
Tyrol	407	1633	m 15.739 f 14.802 tog.30.541	m 814 f 1.567 tog.2.381
Vorarlberg	167	893	m 8.833 f 8.521 tog.17.354	m 441 f 992 tog.1.433
Vienna	247	2196	m 24.961 f 23.429 tog.48.390	m 345 f 3.886 tog.4.231
Austria	3.395 [2])	17.528	m 176.273 f 166.105 tog.342.378[3])	m 5.745 f 22.709 tog.28.454

[1]) Private schools (about 2,3 %) are included.
[2]) In this number are 34 schools with an upper bracket of primary school included.
[3]) In this number are included 9307 pupils attending pre-schools, of which 3810 with renounced premature admission.

There are 3.395 primary schools with 28.454 teachers. In about 27 % of theses schools two or more forms are taught by one teacher only.

1.7 The arrangements for grouping pupils and official class sizes

Usually pupils are grouped by age, but in some federal countries with sparsely populated areas there exist also classes in which there are pupils of different age. One teacher teaches all subjects to his/her class except religious instruction and handicraft. The official class sizes are between 10 and 30 pupils, the average being 20, in optional activities like music (chorus and instrumental music), and physical education there are from 12 to 15 pupils in one group.

1.8 The length of the school day, the school week and the school year

As a rule, instruction must not start before 8 o'clock and it may last maximally 6 periods in the morning, if the afternoon is off. The total number of periods per week has to be distributed by the school head as evenly as possible over the individual days of the week.

Schools operate from Monday to Friday or from Monday to Saturday. This has to be decided by the teachers and parents. There are different models for decision-finding in the federal provinces, but as a rule one can say that if more than 20% want ot change from five-day-week to six-day-week (or the other way round) there has to be another vote.

The number of periods during a week varies between 20 and 26; there is 1 additional hour of remedial instruction for pupils who have learning problems. A period lasts 50 minutes, between the individual periods a sufficient number of breaks lasting between 5 and 20 minutes have to be scheduled.
In the federal provinces of Burgenland, Lower Austria, and Vienna, the school year starts on the first Monday, in the other

federal provinces on the second Monday in September and lasts till the beginning of the following school year, the summer vacations (July and August) included.
So the school year has about 40 weeks.

1.9 The major areas of the primary school curriculum [1)]

The syllabus of primary school only constitutes a frame to be filled in by the teachers's paedagogical work, rather than containing a codification of educational subject matter and content in a fixed amount and a precisely defined sequence. While this permits the application of a nationwide syllabus even for primary school, limited shifts of subject matter, collections of locally relevant subject matter and additional content resulting from local conditions are also possible. Thus the numbers of weekly periods assigned to individual compulsory subjects may be determined, within the limits given in the distribution of class periods, by the provincial school board depending on local conditions. Moreover, there ist the possibility of offering optional subjects and optional exercises, which are intended to cater to individual talents and preferences, as well as to remedial instruction.

In the syllabus of primary school, the grades are combined into two "cycles" covering grades 1 and 2, and grades 3 and 4, respectively. This subdivision is based on the realization of the different development characteristics of the age brackets and on a desire for a cautious modification of the system of single-year classes.

Primary school provides the following compulsory subjects: German, reading, writing, factual instruction German, reading (3rd and 4th grades) mathematics, music education, arts education (1st

[1)] This curriculum was changed in 1986 and the contents were developed along the lines of Project Nr. 8.

and 2nd grades), arts education, writing (3rd and 4th grades), handicraft und physical education. Starting with the 3rd grade, a foreign language (English or French) is offered as a compulsory exercise (without achievement grading). In the 1st and 3rd grades there is also the compulsory exercise traffic education; in addition to this, optional exercises such as choir singing, instrumental music, and physical training, are offered in all four grades, drama in the third and fourth grade.

1.10 The main methods of pupil assessment

The basis of assessment in primary education is the permanent observation of pupils; oral examinations do not exist on the elementary level. But there are six written tests in the mother tongue and in mathematics in the 4th grade, Besides, dictations are possible in the mother tongue and standardized tests are available, although small in number.

1.11 The arrangements for the initial and in-service training of primary school teachers

The teachter training academies train teachers for the primary school and for all other types of compulsory general schools (6 semesters). For further training of teachers, authority mainly rests with the teacher-training institutes in the federal countries.

1.12 Support services which are available to primary schools

The support services which are available to primary schools are psychologists and a free School Medical Service.

The psychologists have to assist the teachers in the field of testing children whether they are not able to attend primary school or should be sent to special schools.

The School Medical Service is free and a school physician comes to each school periodically for medical checks and vaccinations. In the field of pilot projects there exist other support systems

for the teachers, e.g. "psychagogen" and "advisory teachers". These are psychologically trained teachers who support the class-teachers in cases of deviant behaviour of children, advisor teachers also advise the parents.
In classes with a high rate of migrant children there is an additional teacher ("accompanying teacher") for some periods a week to work with foreign children to handle their difficulties in learning German. Also in classes covering more than one grade the class-teacher is accompanied by another teacher for about half of the periods a week to teach all the children of the same grade.

1.13 The institutional links between primary school, parents, and the community

In many primary schools there exist parents associations which have a legal standing. In theory their function ist mainly advisory in certain educational matters (e.g. in the choice of textbooks), in practise they also have a social function. Their fundamental aim is to support the cooperation between parents and school.

In the 4th amendment (1986) to the School Instruction Act institutionalised school community was extended in compulsory general schooling in addition to abready existing parents associations. So one can distinguish between

- already existing parents associations
- talks between the classteacher and the parents about educational questions, about assessment, information about the further educational career and health education, (Schulgesundheitspflege). The number of these meetings isn't limited. They should take place as often as necessary.
- the class-forum, which is formed by the parents, and the class-teachers. On the one hand this body has to decide upon certain matters for example school skiing courses and school country weeks, rule of the house, and discussions on health education. On the other hand it has to give advice on essential

questions of teaching and education, in planning school activities and the dates of consulting hours for parents and for the teaching materials.
- the school-forum has to discuss all the questions concerning more than one single class.

2. Problems and trends in primary edcuation

2.1 School entrance phase (1st - 2nd grade)

The entrance into primary school raises a number of questions. About 13% of the children have to be deferred for one year, more than 1% of pupils repeat voluntarily the first grade although every pupil is allowed to enter the second grade regardless of his or her achievement. And at the end of the 2nd grade more than 2% aren't able to pass on to the 3rd grade and have to repeat year. Therefore you can say that our school entrance phase is highly selective.
Now in the field of pilot projects models are implemented which give the pupils two or three years of time to pass the first cycle. That means that class grouping on the basis of the pupils'age will not be the chief criterion any more, but flexible pupil-grouping arrangements.

2.2 Pilot projects to change the pupils'assessment

At present first grade pupils get one mark for all the subjects (excluding religious instructions) at the end of the first semester (very good, good, satisfying, sufficient, insufficient). At the end of the frist grade in each subject marks from 1 to 5 are awarded although each pupil is allowed to go to the second grade even if some learning processes are not finished before the end of cycle one, e.g. the ability to read fluently is one of the goals which should be reached at the end of the second grade.As this is a very dissatisfying situation school experiments tend towards pupils assessment in the reports at the end of semesters and school years. In many projects all over Austria the marks 1-5 are replaced by a verbal evaluation or both forms are combi-

ned. Most pilot projects concern cycle one. In the federal provinces Vorarlberg and Vienna they also include cycle two.

2.3 Children with special needs

In several federal countries, projects are undertaken to integrate handicapped children into normal classes. In these cases class-teacher and a teacher of a special school plan together the instructions (teamteaching) and in some periods they work with the whole class and others only with groups. At present these projects are merely at the beginning and we have only limited experiences in this field. But this is a branch of pilot projects which is strongly demanded by the parents. As Austria has a long tradition of special schooling e.g. the blind and the deaf, and a very differentiated school system, these projects cause a lot of problems. One has to consider whether schooling in normal classes is the best way of helping pupils with special needs or not. To some extent it is the question of supplying specially trained teachers and special teaching materials, but also a financial question. Beyond this, the question what integration really means is under discussion.
Though it insn't possible to give a definition, one can say that pupils of both groups should be able to work together for a longer phase of the lessons, to fulfil more or less the same tasks, to solve the same problems, to do the same work and so on. Only sitting together in the same classroom isn't really integration. Nor is it integration either if the handicapped child only serves as a means for learning processes of the other pupils.

2.4 Successful teaching as intended by the new primary curriculum

After a period of broad democratic involvement of about 1000 teachers all over Austria in developing a new curriculum (1983-86) now a phase of thorough inservice - training for primary teachers has begun to implement the main ideas of this new curriculum in daily school life and to change teaching methods. Especially pupil orientated methods should be put into practice,

learning by playing and by doing, differentiation, learning as discovering, and individual learning in spontaneous choice periods and so on. Austria thus wants to change teaching on primary level and to create a humane school, better suited to the needs of the pupils.

2.5 Morning school versus day school

The regular Austrian elementary school (up to 26 periods a week; cf.p.8) is a morning school. So in 1974 pilot projects were started in which the daily attendance was extended to 8 hours. This type of school [1]) provides integration of prep-lessons and recreational periods within the schoolday. It offers the possibility for parents to drop their children off at school as early as 7.15 a.m.and collect them as late as 5.30 p.m., because before and after school there are special courses supervised by teachers. In this school the so - called "parallel - teaching - system" has been developed, the aims of which are to distribute all classwork, recreational courses, prep-lessons, lunch hour supervision etc. between two taechers only es evenly as possible. It aims at ensuring complete equivalence of both teachers in the pupil's eyes, thus eliminating the danger of estimating form - masters more highly than teachers of recreational classes. Furthermore it is intended to open new and more effective ways of classwork through complete cooperation and partnership of two teaching - partners. Opportunity is given to the children to relate to two equal but different teaching - partners, similar to the situation in a family.

Though these pilot projects have been successful, Austria tries to find other models which aren't too expensive and make it possible to involve more than 5 % of the schools as nowadays. Because there is a great need of whole-day-schools.

[1]) One of these schools was involved in the Contact School Plan (cf. e.g. DECS/EGT (86) Misc 87).

2.6 Pilot project on handwriting

The alphabet of handwriting which has been used up till now dates from 1924. While many European countries have changed their handwriting to a simpler form, Austria has changed only some letters. Now Austria is undertaking a broad pilot project in about 220 classes with about 5000 pupils all over Austria to change the form of handwriting (cf.p. 15, Kommentar zur Ausgangsschrift). In this project universities as well as teacher -training - institutes are involved.

2.7 Migrant workers

In some classes in urban areas more than 50% of the pupils are children of migrant workers. This causes a lot of social friction, not so much among the pupils but among the parents. Many Austrian parents feel that the quality of instruction in such classes suffers because too much attention is paid to these children's learning difficulties mainly caused by the language barrier. There are different models to improve this situation: additional instruction in German to help them to tackle the language problem, e.g. German as a foreign language or to have a second teacher in these classes to support the class-teacher. In about 5 periods a week the so called "accompanying teacher" works with those migrant children who cannot speak German at all.

3. Important studies on primary education [1]

Dieter Antoni - Wilhelm Wolf (editing):
Maßnahmen im Schuleingangsbereich, published by the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts, and Sports; aps-volume no. 14, Vienna 1986.

This brochure gives recommendations on the basis of the new primary school curriculum, e.g. how to start schooling, to change assessment, for pilot projects in the school entrance phase

[1]) This is only a selected list of important studies in Austria.

(cf.p. no. 12), for initial-/and in-service-training and for better information of the parents and guardians.

Erziehung und Unterricht published by Österreichischer Bundesverlag Wien, Jugend & Volk, Wien, München April 1984: Grundschulentwicklung in Österreich.
In this pedagogical journal one can find an outline of the development of primary education in Austria.

Ludwig Boyer: Kommentar zur Ausgangsschrift;
published by the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts, and Sports;
aps-volume no. 12, Vienna 1986
This booklet gives a short summary of the history of writing in Austria and the reasons for a reform. It compares international developments in this field and gives concise background information about the new alphabet.

Friedrich Buchberger, Klaus Satzke (editing):
Förderunterricht Grundlagen - Verfahren - Ergebnisse,
Jugend & Volk, Wien - München, 1980, 237 Seiten,
ISBN 3-71441-5316-2

The first part outlines the theoretical basis of remedial instruction.

The second part ("methods") deals with didactical problems like first reading, going beyond the number 10, doing arithmetic in text form etc.

The third part deals with the results of pilot studies to realize remedial instruction and the connection with the teaching schedule (cf.p.no 7). It also contains the legal basis of remedial instruction.

Franz Burgstaller - Leo Leitner: Pädagogische Markierungen/Probleme - Prozesse - Perspektiven/ 25 Jahre österreichische Schul-

geschichte (1962-1987), Österreichischer Bundesverlag, Wien 1987, 299 pages.
This book deals with the history of schools in Austria since 1962, and mentions the problems, processes, perspectives and trends in pre-school and in primary education as well as in the other types of schools and in the initial teacher training.
It is also very helpful as a reference book to important literature on the various topics.

Austria: Organization of Education 1984-86
Published by the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Sports in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Science and Research, Vienna 1986.
This booklet gives a brief summary of the organization and structure of the whole Austrian education system, the principles, aims, and objectives, on curricula, pilot projects, educational statistics and documentary references.

Herbert Haberl (editing): Selbsttätiges und individuelles Lernen in freien Arbeitsphasen, Schriftenreihe zur Pädagogischen Tatsachenforschung, Pädagogisches Institut des Bundes in Salzburg, 1986, 56 pages

This brochure gives a brief introduction in the pilot project, which was also a case study on Project No. 8: [1]) Spontaneous and individual learning in free choice periods (Montessori) in Salzburg.

Leopold Kratochvil - Franz Hammerer: Freie Lernphasen in einer Schule zum Kinde hin, published in Erziehung und Unterricht, 10/1985, 11 pages.
This article describes free phases of learning as an essential element in a childorientated school, defines it in opposite to

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[1]) cf. also DECS/EGT (86) 54

other arrangements of learning and shows ways of putting it into practice.

Wolf Fritz: Die Volksschule, Stagnation oder Neuformierung?
In: Unser Weg, 35/1980, 8 Seiten

This essay is a survey of the situation of primary education in Steiermark (Styria).

Wilhelm Wolf: Alternative Formen des Leistungsbeurteilung in der Grundschule? published in "Recht der Schule" Heft 3/1986, 11 pages.
This article outlines the actual situation of assessment in primary schools, compares the situation in different European countries and favours alternatives to the given system.